DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 954 CS 000 533

AUTHOR Lang, Helene
TITLE "Literary Models for Adolescent Behavior." Literature in the Secondary School Program.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Assn. (18th, Denver, Colorado, May 1-4, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Literary Analysis; *Literary Influences; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Development; *Reading Interests; Secondary School Students; *Student Reaction
IDENTIFIERS *Adolescent Literature

ABSTRACT

Several literary models from both contemporary and standard books that influence the adolescent are presented. The discussion is divided into three broad model categories: the question of morality, the search for self, and values and needs. The novel is the principal literary mode discussed, but other genres are also included. The exploration of actual works of literature and a discussion of student responses to these books concludes the paper. (TO)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 076954

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Dr. Helene Lang
University of Vermont
410 Waterman Building
Burlington, Vermont 05401

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Helene Lang
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

"Literary Models for Adolescent Behavior"
Literature in the Secondary School Program
3:45-4:45 p.m. Thursday, May 3, 1973

The Why of Literature - It's Value

In addition to the experiences of living, of being, of acquiring information via orally verbal means; there is that time when reading becomes a means of acquiring and developing experience. One can truly say that intellectual development, cognition and affective behavior can be considerably increased or altered through the act of reading. Reading is a very precious skill when rightly used. If we read well what has been written well - studying with care what has been painstakingly phrased - what happens is the clearest possible communication between minds and hearts. (1) It is the magnifying glass that explores the human consciousness in depth. The reading of literature opens us up to the world, and makes us more sensitive to it, as if we had acquired eyes that could see through

CS 000 533

things and ears that could hear smaller sounds.(2)

The great makers of literature are door-openers and teenagers especially need to be given, not what they already know but what they have not yet divined. The young are quite unable to comprehend the doubleness of things, the unexpected paradox, the sense of yes-no without which there can be no true intelligence, no means of examining life as opposed to letting it wash over you.(3)

The novel gives a rapturous meeting between the artist's provate vision and the haunting, ambiguous, paradoxical world of feeling and objects. These are all interlaced in the texture of experience, in the fabric of living.

The Question of Morality in Literature

All living, all of life, all of literature raises the questions of yes-no, good-bad and many areas in-between these extremes. Hence, there is the question of values, of morality, of behavior which manifests these codes and these ethics. Hamlet has said, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so".

The meaning of the word "morality" is equated with "good". From the Latin "mores" comes the meaning "popular custom". Then what is popular or commonly accepted is "good" and anything not customary is "bad" or against the "mores" or immoral. Through the years of usage "moral" has come to suggest "good" according to abstract or religious standards. For many people commonness

and popularity have nothing to do with goodness. The problem of morality or immorality is complicated by the fact that what was immoral in one historical time becomes acceptable, or good, or just neutral in a new time.

A new morality is developing with the idea that it is all right to do anything as long as it does not hurt someone else. It is being applied to problems of cheating, drugs, and sex.(4) This idea of not hurting someone else causes questions to arise concerning our relationships of interdependence on others. Is it truly possible to hurt only oneself and not hurt others? And what is so advantageous about being hurt anyway? Self-distruction is a very sick disease. To look inward is not always promising as books like The Wild One and Wild in the World will attest.

The Search for Self

The best known adolescent novels such as Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, Knowle's A Separate Peace and Golding's Lord of the Flies concern themselves with the adolescent protagonists search for self-definition. Each man has a self and enlarges his self by experience; from the experience of others as well as his own, from the inner experiences as well as the outer. Merely reading the printed page will not enable the self to enter into the experience with the protagonist. It is necessary to identify ourselves with other men, to relive their experiences and to feel the conflict. To share these

conflicts is to share the human dilemma. The knowledge of self cannot be formalized because it cannot be closed, even provisionally: it is perpetually open, because the dilemma is perpetually unresolved.(5)

The human dilemma of search for self goes on as the search for values continues. Values that are more comprehensive, more societal. The identity with protagonist may be present as one strains through the rapids of James Dickey's Deliverance, but the larger question becomes one of asking; is it moral to leave one's friend and one's enemy buried in or near the river? Is it moral to by-pass the law when it is practiced in backcountry perversity? The mal-practice of law and justice that is revealed in William Armstrong's Sounder and in Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order. Racism and religious bigotry are two of the most important social issues young readers will have to face during the 1970's.(6)

How are important social issues handled in good literature? Here is probably one of the most distinguishing characteristic of great and even good literature. Important issues and important values are handled with no sermonizing.....no spinning out of facts, no rattling of dry bones. Rather with subtle reserve the very important ideas are presented. In small ways the nuances of values are woven within the story. In small ways the writer, who is artist, conveys to the reader the worth of ideas and values. It is rather like the line from one of T.S. Eliots' poems. The line that says, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

The author also uses that fine mark in his writing that distinguishes what is truly important from what is maudlin.

Values and Needs

A writer helps the reader define himself: his work, his family, his symbols, his community, his knowledge and his values. The following is a partical list of items used in a value clarification exercise. The student is asked to select five items that represent his most important values and then rank order them.

Personal Life Goals

1. Financial success
2. Position of responsibility
3. Happy marriage
4. Being a leader
5. Creative powers
6. Good health
7. Intellectual stimulation
8. Athletic achievement
9. Manual skills
10. Someone to love
11. Respect of contemporaries
12. Children
13. Friendships
14. Political power
15. Sexual equality

Personal Life Goals (cont.)

16. Ability to speak a foreign language
17. To be well liked
18. Individuality
19. Positive self-image
20. Spiritual fulfillment
21. _____

Next, the student is instructed to act as the protagonist in the novel and select five items of value as that person would select them. Another use is to select items as the author might select them. Worthwhile discussion ensues.

What are the values of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society that lives in the age of technology as a member of the nuclear family? What are our young people's concerns?

There are some constants that exist regardless of the era in which we live such as physical maturity, and the importance of peer acceptance. The adolescent can be at the same time both self-centered and gregarious. It is a time of tightrope walking between apprehension of the future and precarious happiness of the present. There exists a terrific drive for action and excitement. At times this can border on the bizarre, the horrible. Hero worship can be for hero traits that are just as diverse. On the one hand, admirable traits such as kindness to animals and people, fairness and justice, generosity and humility of spirit. On the other hand, the hero traits may be: brute strength, craftiness, unwholesome attitudes toward love and marriage.(7)

The world of the adolescent has been compared to a radio playing AM - loud, insistant, banal racket. While the world of the adult (those over thirty) is a radio playing FM - formal, rarefied, and subtle. This distinction has been further developed to include schools, curriculum, the teaching of English and literature as being definitely in the FM classification.

What follows next is the obvious response of such terms as "relevant" and "interest". John Dewey has said that when things have to be made interesting, it is because interest itself is wanting. Moreover, the phrase is a misnomer. The thing, the object, is no more interesting than it was before. The appeal is simply made to the student's love of something else.(8) "Relevant" literature does not necessarily mean current literature; it means literature which contains the emotional depth and human behavior to which the reader can relate. Relevant literature; literature for entertainment and edification has been around since the days of Homer. Yet four times in the last fifty years, literature has been challenged. The intervention of mass media (movies, news periodicals, radio, television) has made an onslaught on literature. But the art of readings has withstood.(9)

Some Examples

The art of reading that is enhanced by exploring the themes of courage, honor, pride, hope, and compassion. The themes that deal with important ideas in books; that can be

reinforced, enriched, and extended with other media such as movies or television.

Courage demonstrated by Winston Churchill in the paperback book entitled Young Winston. In the film of the same name is the same courage evidenced in time of war, in the overcoming of school discipline, in following the footsteps of a famous father. In Hey, White Girl there is the courage of the only white girl at a Ghetto school. Courage of the boy in Sounder to visit his father while in jail, and the greater courage to rise above the white man's injustice. The physical handicap of deafness in David in Silence shows another kind of courage. As a result of a plane crash, Helen Klaben spent forty-nine days in the frozen Yukon and wrote a story of courage, hope and faith entitled Hey, I'm Alive. Otto Kieps' courage to attempt Nazi resistance is told in the book by Bruce Clements, From Ice Set Free.

Very often the themes of books intertwine so that this interlacing creates a fabric of thought and a texture of experience. For teaching and working with books this interlacing of themes can be efficient and worthwhile. Jerome Bruner has demonstrated that the working solution to the knowledge explosion is to cultivate the art of connecting things that are akin, connecting them into the structures that give them significance.(10) Often a book can be selected, read, and interpreted on one theme and discovered to contain more than one theme. John Knowles suggested starting with the

concrete set of people and experiences; then go on to the underlying reverberations and themes.(11) He also suggested a help to develop taste (or to move from AM to FM.) The transition from mainly fast action to a mix with slow action and fuller development of character, motive and themes. A Separate Peace is much more then Phinney at Devon. Characters and situations tell about their lives and lives in general and hopefully, the deep, inner knowledge of life itself.

It seems impossible to ask students, or adults for that matter, to operate at the FM level constantly. There are times when AM provides pleasure and knowledge. Listening taste can vacillate from AM "Alone Again, Naturally" by Gilbert O'Sullivan to FM "Brandenburg Concerto No. 2" by Bach.

Then reading tastes can go from AM The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton to FM A Separate Peace by John Knowles. The behavioral elements, nurtured by this vacillating, contribute to the needs of the reader. Elements that are personal and social. The need to know the latest AM hit or the most recent popular reading. Also, it is realized that no one can be at peak performance constantly. The need exists for just taking things slower and not going at top speed.

Summary

What we call literature gives the reader an intensified sense of existence, a revelation. It gives the reader, people with idiosyncrasies and habits and beliefs, people with histories

and futures which the reader can dwell upon when the last page is turned.(12) It is the "dwelling upon afterwoods" that continues to mold behavior, to determine values, and to enrich lives. Young people with values and committment should be the ultimate outcome of good literature programs. It is an act of creation, with midwives known as educators, that literature can serve. But there is no creation without faith and hope. There is no faith and hope that does not express itself in creation.(13)

(1) Wilbur, Richard. Reading Teacher, Vol. 26, No. 6 (March 1973)

(2) Howes, Alan. Teaching Literature to Adolescents. Glenview, Illinois: 1972, p. 52

(3) Vidal, Gore. Two Sisters. Boston: Little Brown, 1970, p. 41

(4) Leavitt, Hart. The Writer's Eye. New York: Bantam, 1969, p. 158

(5) Bronowski, John. "The Logic of the Mind," The American Scholar. (Spring, 1966), p. 240

(6) Reid, Virginia, ed. Reading Ladders for Human Relations. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1972, p.3

(7) Pilgrim, Geneva and McAllister, Mariana. Books, Young People, and Reading Guidance. New York: Harper and Row, 1968, p.9

(8) Dewey, John. Interest and Effort in Education. New York: Capricorn Books, 1935, p. 11.

(9) Simonson, Soloman. "Is Literature Dying?" The Educational Forum. (May, 1966) 423-424.

(10) Bruner, Jerome. "Liberal Education for All Youth," Education Digest. Vol. 31, (February 1966) p.8.

(11) Knowles, John. "An Interview with John Knowles," Teaching Literature to Adolescents: Novels. Glenview, Illinois: 1972. p.147.

(12) Cameron, Eleanor. "McLuhan, Youth, and Literature," Horn Book. (December 1972) p. 578

(13) Wilder, Thornton. The Eighth Day. New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 107

A slide presentation and list of books will accompany this speech delivered May 3, 1973 in Denver.